

Presbyterians for Police Transformation  
310 Tulip Avenue  
Takoma Park, MD 20912

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Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue  
Rockville, MD 20850

Testimony for Amending the Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD) 2024 Budget

We, the Presbyterians for Police Transformation (PfPT), a ministry of Takoma Park Presbyterian Church (TPPC), people of faith and followers of the Jesus who modeled and taught nonviolent resistance, write to urge the council to make Montgomery County a leader in showing how investing in social services reduces crime and increases public safety.

We are in a Kairos moment. The number of vacancies in the police force creates a unique opportunity to restructure the force, shifting its social service calls to other agencies who are more appropriately staffed to provide those services. All the money saved should be distributed to expand Mobile Crisis Outreach Teams (MCOTs), fund therapists and peer counselors in schools and elsewhere, provide restorative justice, drug treatment and youth programs and a guaranteed basic income to those most in need. This includes using the large hiring bonuses, to recruit these staff instead of new police officers.

From our inception, we have strongly supported shifting a portion of public funds now going to policing to non-policing services, i.e., other interventions that are less dangerous, particularly to people of color, and more successful at de-escalation and preventing violence. This would help prevent the criminalizing of non-criminal behavior and address the real causes of a safety situation such as mental illness, substance abuse, homelessness, etc.

We continue opposing MCPD officers in schools, whether that be as School Resource Officers (SROs) or the current Community Engagement Officers (CEOs). Overall, research shows that school officer programs do nothing to prevent shootings or gun-related incidents and have disproportional harmful effects on Black students and students with disabilities. Unfortunately this is also true in our county. In the school year 2021-2022, Black students made up 22% of the MCPS student population, yet represented 45% of the CEO arrests and special education students made up 13% yet were arrested 25% of the time.

Instead of officers, all school staff need to be equipped to deescalate situations, calling police only in the 1% or fewer incidents of immediate safety. To accomplish this, train all school staff to more quickly implement Restorative Justice (RJ) programs. Fund this training by reducing police weapons training and not purchasing weapons such as rifles and drones that perpetuate a warrior culture. Also add sufficient RJ coordinators and increase school and peer counselors and social workers.

We oppose the 36% increase in the MCPD Community Resources Bureau (CRB) budget which CEOs fall under. CRB proposes increasing community events, such as basketball tournaments to 2-3 times a day. Give this money instead to Parks and Recreation to increase the number of leagues and provide scholarships so that families that cannot currently afford to participate can do so. Providing activities and summer jobs is a more equitable use of our county tax dollars. Our expectation is that police earn

the trust of the community by treating every person with respect and dignity, even when they may appear threatening.

Be courageous in standing up for equity by making the above changes to the 2024 budget.

In hope for an equitable and just county,

Laura Heaven  
laura.heaven@gmail.com

Ferd Hoefner  
fhoefner@gmail.com

Mary Jacksteit  
mary.jacksteit@gmail.com

Wendy Lukehart  
wendylukehart@gmail.com

Ruth Noel  
rmnoel@verizon.net

Carolyn Seaman  
cseaman@umbc.edu